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DELIVERANCE. THE FREEING OF THE SPIRIT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.
HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR, Litt.D. The Macmillan Co. 1915. Pp. 294.
\$1.25.

This latest book by the author of *The Mediæval Mind* is intended not so much for professional students of the history of religions, as for those who combine an elementary knowledge of the subject with a real interest in the ways in which men of different ages and of different lands have sought adjustment with the universe. Such readers will, indeed, find certain chapters—as, for example, that on Paul—so full of allusions to technical problems as to be well-nigh unintelligible; but these chapters may be passed by with little loss, for they are the least successful in the book, and the least fruitful as well for the specialist as for the general reader. Where, however, Dr. Taylor is less pretentious in his scholarship—as in the chapter on “The Heroic Adjustment in Greek Poetry”—he gives his readers an insight into the religion of the men of the ancient world that is as remarkable as that which *The Mediæval Mind* gave into the thought and thinkers of another period.

This book is not a systematic treatise on the religions of ancient times, and it must not be read as such. It is rather, as the author himself says, a collection of “night thoughts” about the religious life of the ancient world, with many of the delightful whimsies and insights that come to a man of wide reading and cultivated mind in the night watches. By the canons of such writing this book is, in many of its chapters, thoroughly successful; to test it by any other canons is hardly fair to the author.

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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN PLOTINUS. B. A. G. FULLER. Cambridge University Press. 1912. Pp. xx, 333.

A perusal of this book is calculated to promote chastening reflections upon the nature of philosophy's advance. There is an evident shock in discovering that most of the classical attempts to provide a solution for the problem of evil are represented here, that even the metaphors and analogies by which we try to relieve the situation are identical with those of seventeen hundred years ago. They may wear an ancient dress, but the figures beneath are the same. If one be inclined to demand that the labor of the human mind upon these central issues should move more swiftly, let him compare the fruits of his best reflection with those of Neo-Platonism.

The scope of the work is sufficiently indicated by the title. The Introduction and the first chapter are preliminary to the main business of clarifying and criticising Plotinus' argument. A fourfold classification of evil is adopted: metaphysical evil, the existence of finitude as such; physical evil or suffering; moral evil, the sting of which is traced to the facts that man has to make choices and that all choice is destructive of so much possible good; and, finally, "the apparent injustice with which nature apportions reward to merit." The historical growth of these problems as it determined Plotinus' approach is next briefly indicated. The chief purpose of this survey is to show that "Plotinus succeeds to two traditions or points of view—the naturalistic and mystic—which were left him, with years of accumulation and development between, by Plato. . . . On the one hand, he inherits the Hellenic belief and joy in natural goods . . . partially expressed in Plato and Aristotle, and over-reaching itself and complicated with an ascetic morality in the metaphysical system of the Stoics. On the other hand, all the fruits of a mysticism and dualism latent in Plato and Aristotle, strong in certain cults of the popular religion, and ripened in the later Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic movement—the hatred of matter, the scorn of the world, the contempt of the body, the despair of reason, the yearning after the infinite and ineffable where alone the soul can find peace and its true beloved—these were all his."¹ After a chapter outlining the main features of the Plotinian system, the author passes to a very detailed and discriminating consideration of Plotinus' efforts to deal with the problem of evil in the forms already mentioned; concluding with two chapters on Matter as the principle of evil, and the Theory of Emanation respectively. The former of these is a careful and especially illuminating analysis. One cannot help feeling that Mr. Fuller has here revealed a bar sinister in the pedigree of the Absolutely Homogeneous.

Throughout the work Mr. Fuller presents both the arguments of Plotinus and his own criticisms in fine detail, but he lightens the labor of attention by returning again and again to a central theme: that Plotinus alternates between these two incompatible points of view—the naturalistic and the mystic—seeking refuge now in one, now in the other, so that a consistent solution of his difficulties is denied him. One example of this may be given. Take the case of the failure of any finite particular, any man for example, to realize his own perfection. No man is the perfect man. How is the evil thus implied to be justified? From the naturalistic point of view

¹ P. 329.

the answer would seem to be simple. If each man perfectly embodied the Platonic idea of man, there would be, on the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, not many men at all, but one Man, the only member of a class of one. "Hence, if there are individual men, they must by reason of their individuality fall short of their ideal nature." That is, any man can be justified for being no better than he is by the plea that he is as good as can be expected of *him*; he is at any moment perfect as the nature-fact is perfect. There is thus an indefinite number of kinds of perfection. But, as mystic, Plotinus was forced to a different conclusion. Just as the One was the most perfect and in fact the only truly perfect being, so that in comparison with it even *νοῦς* and *ψυχὴ* fell short, in the same way any particular man exhibits a deficiency in so far as he falls short of the universal human type. To be a particular man is to be a failure, and men differ only in degrees of imperfection. But such a pessimistic result was intolerable. Plotinus is unwilling to abandon either line of thought, and his alleged solution consists in holding to both points of view simultaneously. He will insist on grading kinds of perfection so that one perfection can be more perfect than another, with the paradoxical result in this case, as Mr. Fuller acutely observes, "that the proper perfection of the individual man consists, when all is said and done, in failing to attain it."¹ This is only one instance of Plotinus' double attitude; but in great part the fascination of the book is owing to the skill with which Mr. Fuller detects its influence upon his treatment of the problem in its various aspects. His inevitable conclusion is that Plotinus "comes out by the same door wherein he went. His theodicy ends in the dilemma from which it started. Either God is not justified or Evil is not explained."²

To pass to some comments. With regard to Mr. Fuller's general formulation of the problem of evil some criticisms suggest themselves. It is, he says, "the problem of reconciling the hypothesis of a good and beneficent God with the existence of an evil and apparently imperfect world. Or, since omnipotence is commonly regarded as an attribute of divinity, it asks how God can be at once omnipotent and entirely good." Omnipotence he then proceeds to define as "the non-existence [for God] of those limitations in power which alone seem to hinder us from realizing our ideal of a happy and perfect life."³ He goes on to indicate four possible types of solution, and finds none of them convincing. Is it any wonder? For is it not clear that so to define omnipotence is to make the problem insoluble from the beginning? If an omnipotent being is one which

¹ P. 142.² P. 333.³ P. 19.

can "do anything it likes," then all its creations are unconditioned and arbitrary, and we can ask of any one of them why it should hold a place in being rather than any other conceivable creation. "Why this rather than that?" is a question which will then remain legitimately open to all eternity. All ultimate questions about reality will be unanswerable, for the reason that a being whose power is expressed as freedom from limitation is not omnipotent but very impotence itself. It is strange that Mr. Fuller should have rested his statement of the problem on such a scholastic concept of omnipotence instead of following the clue to its meaning given by the religious consciousness, which, as he says, "needs and assumes in its God *power enough* to carry the evolution of reality through to a happy consummation";¹ though we cannot agree with him that a dualistic theory will satisfy this requirement.

In the second place, the whole conception of a problem of metaphysical evil to which chapter ii is devoted is open to some question. "The expression 'metaphysical evil' I have employed to express that *a priori* dissatisfaction with the mere fact of the finite, quite apart from any *a posteriori* valuation of it, which is characteristic of so much mystic thought. The world from this point of view is evil for no other reason than that it is a world; the individual imperfect because he is himself and not another, one fact among many and not the only fact."² To begin with, one may doubt if there has ever existed such an *a priori* dissatisfaction with the finite. Can we seriously believe that any man has ever wanted to be the whole of reality or was dissatisfied because he was not? Where we find such an apparent ambition it is worth while inquiring if it be not open to some other interpretation. Certainly this is no true account of the mystic "*nostalgie de l'au-delà*." That there have been those whose love of God has seemed to them to compete with the love of the world one cannot deny, but these do not constitute even the majority of the mystics. If we turn to the experience of those who are commonly recognized as the great mystics—to their experience as distinct from their own interpretation of it—what we find is a state of unrest created by a consciousness of *alienation* from God, from that which makes life worth living. What they report as their achievement is the surmounting of the barriers which separate man from God, the overcoming of that "pathos of distance." The mystic has become one with God. Even if he sometimes describes his attainment as deification, he does so at the cost of denying his motive, which is confessedly not deification but restoration to

¹ P. 223.² P. 2.

union with God. It is not the mystic who condemns finitude as such. And where we find such a judgment, namely, in connection with a philosophy of the abstract universal, it is not *a priori* but an inference from that doctrine, which already has its own standard of logical perfection. Is the difficulty then of deducing the Many from the One fairly to be called a form of the general problem of evil?

The argument has made it clear to us that, metaphysically, Plotinus is a Mr. Facing-both-ways. But it remains a matter for wonder that Plotinus should have been blind to this inconsistency. The fact that he inherited two conflicting tendencies in thought is hardly enough to account for this failure in logic on the part of such an acute thinker. Some powerful influence must have been at work to strengthen the tenacity of that hold on two views at once: the world of finite objects as utterly incomplete and evil, and that world and everything in it as nevertheless perfect. The suggestion is here offered that we have in this confusion a report of mystical experience, and in his metaphysics the traces of familiar stages in the mystical life. It is noteworthy that Plotinus was not only a speculative mystic but, as we learn from his biographer, one who "practised the presence of God." Now we know that in the career of many mystics there is a world-negating period, when the mind is withdrawn from all particular objects in its concentrated thrust of attention upon its Absolute Object; and also a world-affirming period, when the mystic, returning to the world, sees in a new light all he had spurned. The very things whose worth he had denied have now become freighted with divine significance; he is able to perceive all about him echoes and traces of deity. His experience has been one of arrival, of touching the most real. It is as though from that vantage point of attainment he sees how his negations have been the steps by which he mounted to the vision; the world which he had left is now, upon his return, seen as the mediator between man and God. The history of the normal mystic career is the history of just such continual alternation, and by some Christian mystics, such as Behmen and the author of the *Theologia Germanica*, the principle of it has been recognized and formulated in the doctrine of "The Two Eyes of the Soul." We are perhaps justified in assuming that Plotinus was subject to this type of experience; and if so, may we not discern in this twofold judgment of worth a record less of his thinking than of his spiritual history, and may not the very obstinacy of that refusal to surrender either view reflect the alternate certainties of the flight from

the world of unconvincing worth and the return to a world reborn in the light of the mystic vision? This hypothesis receives support from another consideration. Plotinus, in attempting to find reasons why the One should ever have broken the circle of its own self-contained perfection and given rise to the world of manifold particulars, does not always fall back on the imagery of physical processes, such as the radiation of light or of perfume. Sometimes the analogy is psychological. Thus he writes: "How then should the most perfect and primal Good stay shut up within itself as though grudging of itself or impotent?"¹ Again, referring to the One and its relation to the world, he talks of "that which has after all given it being out of mere generosity."² The idea of a principle which through a superabundance of being must express itself, constantly recurs. May we suppose that Plotinus is attributing to the One that same psychological need for expression which marks the mystic consciousness? Few things are more significant in mysticism than that strange union of an urgent need to unfold and declare the content of the experience with the statement that the object of the vision is in its nature inexpressible. It is the mystic who has told us that he who knows the truth is silent; none have been more prolific in utterance than he. Plotinus does not escape the paradox. He will reiterate the ineffability of the One; yet so continuous is his effort to tell us about it that he sets the mind on a constant strain. If Plotinus had in mind that passion which urged him to utter the burden of the mystic revelation, may it not have been easy for him to assume that the One would be driven in similar fashion to utter itself in this variegated world?

In so far as a general criticism is implied in these reflections it is this: that Mr. Fuller has not done justice to the real mystic strain in Plotinus; he has not seen that mysticism is not necessarily identical with a bad philosophy, and thus he has not distinguished Plotinus the seeker after God from Plotinus the philosopher of the abstract universal. We are beginning to discover that mysticism has done less than justice to itself in choosing that doctrine to represent it in the world of theory, and we have yet to learn fully what practical mysticism may have to offer to philosophy in the way of suggestions both for statement and solution of its problems.

Yet these remarks are intended less as a criticism of the book before us than as comments upon its power of suggestion. Mr. Fuller has limited himself to a discussion of a particular problem as it appears in one historical form; but just because within these

¹ *Enn.* v, 4, i.

² *Ibid.*, iv, 8, 6.

limits he has been faithfully patient in exposition and searching in criticism, he has produced a work of universal significance. He has not only contributed to our understanding of the extraordinary richness and the wide range of Plotinus' thought, but he has shown in what directions and how deep run the roots of the problem of evil in the soil of absolutism. This, even if it be negative, is no small service. It may be that in some ways the burden of the problem has been lightened for us since Plotinus struggled with it, but nevertheless such difficulties as he accumulates in trying to account for moral evil (e.g. p. 200 ff.) are in principle the same as confront our current Absolute Idealisms, and whoever sharpens our perception of them performs a work of present value.

Mr. Fuller's style is the servant by nature of a finely tempered mind. It is exact, concise, and unusually lucid. There is the sparkle of frost and the glint of steel in this work of penetrating analysis and dexterous criticism.

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THE ENLARGING CONCEPTION OF GOD. HERBERT ALDEN YOUTZ. The Macmillan Co. 1914. Pp. x, 199. \$1.25.

Professor Youtz's book is one more of the innumerable protests of our day against "dogma" and in favor of freedom, liberalism, the tone of the age. It tells us of the peril of a fixed and safe theology and the merit of a theology pliant to the needs and spirit of our period. It is accordingly not free from what must be called vague commonplace, more particularly in the opening portion. But the persisting reader has his reward. As we go further we catch inspiration, and when we reach the eminence of the last chapter and from there look back over the book, we feel a certain greatness. What we have by this time fairly well in our grasp is by no means commonplace.

The first chapter, whose name is also the title of the book, argues that our best conception of a living God must have its roots in contemporary thought and morality; it must reflect the ruling mental ideas of the times; or, in another phrase, "the ideals that control men's thinking today" should be decisive in shaping the God-ideal. In the following chapter the contrast is presented between traditional and modern theological method. The true method is to learn the spiritual gospel from Jesus Christ and from all experience and history as the context of Jesus and his gospel, and then